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## **Libby hearing in D.C. pushed back until June**

HELENA - This week's scheduled U.S. Senate hearing on Libby was postponed until at least June, a spokesman for Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., said Monday.

The hearing in Washington, D.C., first requested by Baucus last fall, was to have been held Thursday before the Subcommittee on Superfund, Toxics, Risk and Waste Management. Baucus spokesman Bill Lombardi said the postponement will allow people from Montana to travel to the meeting without having to pay for last-minute prices for plane tickets.

Christine Whitman, administrator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, had been invited to talk about the agency's potential plans for removing asbestos-contaminated insulation from Libby-area homes.

The EPA is considering declaring a public health emergency in Libby, allowing the agency to receive federal funding to remove Zonolite insulation from an estimated 800 homes and businesses.

Zonolite was made from vermiculite mined in Libby from the 1920s until 1990, when the mine closed. W.R. Grace and Co. bought the mine in 1963.

Asbestos that contaminates the vermiculite ore in Libby has sickened hundreds of people there, and at least 200 have died.

The town is scheduled to be designated a Superfund site sometime this year.

*Missoulian State Bureau*